



An Advocate's Guide to the FY 2026 Environmental Education Appropriations Campaign April 2025

Background

Federal environmental education (EE) programs through the EPA and NOAA provide critical funding for state and local education initiatives that help students and the general public participate in community-based solutions to environmental issues. *For fiscal year 2026, we are seeking level funding for these essential programs equal to the current year's amount.*

Appropriations subcommittees in the Senate and House will begin to hold meetings in the coming weeks to determine funding allocations for the FY '26 budget. These appropriations will be influenced, in part, by requests that come from other members of Congress in the form of electronic "Dear Colleague" letters in support of individual programs. **It is important that we generate as many Congressional signatures for the letters regarding EE programs at NOAA and EPA as possible over the next couple of weeks!** The letters may have different deadlines, but all timelines are all very short, so we urge you to make your initial contacts ASAP - today!

Here are the current deadlines as we know them:

- ***EPA House letter—signatures by May 13***
- ***EPA Senate Letter—signatures by May 20***
- ***NOAA House & Senate—TBD, but assume similar timelines***

If you have any questions, contact:

Brock Adler, brockadler@gmail.com or Sarah Bodor, sarah@naaee.org - Thanks!

The Programs We Are Supporting

National Environmental Education Act / EPA Office of Environmental Education

This 30-year-old federal program directs essential grants to environmental education (EE) across the country. It funds innovative programming, facilitates key professional development, enables scholars and practitioners to conduct basic research, and provides vital basic services for the field. The program is central to the work of EE, including a local grant program key for communities all around the US. [Environmental Education Grant Descriptions | US EPA](#) (Link is external.)

- **NAAEE Position:** This very effective program should be funded at \$9.5 million for fiscal year 2026, the same as FY '25.
- **Our Ask:** We urge Representatives to sign a letter circulated by Rep. Neguse (CO-2) to appropriators in support of this funding and Senators to sign a similar letter from Sen. Gillibrand (NY) to the Senate subcommittee that focuses on the Interior and other departments, including the EPA program.
- Here is the letter that is currently being [circulated in the House](#) and here is the letter [circulating in the Senate](#) in support of EPA/NEEA funding. You can reference these letters in your calls and/or forward to Congressional offices.

Download or link to our [fact sheet on funding the National Environmental Education Act](#) via the EPA Office of Environmental Education to share with Congressional offices.

NOAA Bay Watershed Education and Training Program (B-WET)

The NOAA B-WET program promotes locally relevant, experiential learning for K-12 students. The competitive, peer-reviewed funding promotes “meaningful watershed educational experiences” in six regions: California, Chesapeake Bay, Gulf of Mexico, Great Lakes, Hawai’i, New England, and the Pacific Northwest. Since 2002, NOAA has invested over \$100 million to support more than 800 B-WET projects. Funding has been stagnant over the past few years, while the need for this type of education has grown dramatically. www.noaa.gov/office-education/bwet/awards (Link is external.)

- **NAAEE Position:** We endorse level funding of \$8.7 million for fiscal year 2026.
- **Our Ask:** We urge Members of Congress to sign a combined letter to Appropriators in support of this funding for the B-WET Program (and ELP described below).
- A letter will be circulating in the House by Rep. Castor (FL-15) and in the Senate by Sen. Markey (MA). We will post those letters as soon as we have them, but you can go ahead and ask your representatives to look out for them and urge them to sign.

NOAA Environmental Literacy Program (ELP)

This important program provides the public with science-based environmental education related to increasing community resilience and efficacy in solving local environmental problems. Funding for the ELP program has been level for a number of years, while demand for the funding has grown. www.elp-awards.education.noaa.gov/index.php (Link is external.)

- **NAAEE Position:** We endorse level funding of \$6 million for fiscal year 2026.
- **Our Ask:** We urge Members of Congress to sign a combined letter to Appropriators in support of this funding and the ELP program (and B-WET described above).
- Again, Rep. Castor (FL-15) and Sen. Markey (MA) will circulate letters in the House and Senate. We will post those letters as soon as we have them, but you can go ahead and ask your representatives to look out for them and urge them to sign.

Download or link to our [fact sheet on NOAA B-WET and ELP funding](#) to share with Congressional offices.

What You Can Do and How To Do It

If this is the first time you have participated in this effort, here is a [complete fundamentals guide](#) to the advocacy process. It does overlap some with the rest of the material in this document, but if you think you need the basics, then go to that guide first.

The main task is to email specific staff in the D.C. offices of your Senators and Representatives to ask that their boss sign on to electronic “Dear Colleague” letters in support of EE programs at NOAA and EPA, as detailed above. If you already have a relationship with a staff member in your Congressional offices, you should email them directly with the request. If you don’t have a current contact, check this [spreadsheet](#) to see if we have a contact (or sometimes two) for you to email. If not, call the D.C. office to find out who the right person is to email. **Note: On the spreadsheet, there’s a tab at the bottom to toggle between House and Senate.**

You will be contacting two Senators and one or more Representatives—the rep where you live and where you work if this is in a separate congressional district. This is a perfectly okay thing to do. If you don’t know who your House member is, go to [www.house.gov](#), and there is a zip code lookup at the top of the web page.

In preparation for writing the email (see template below), you should note the following items:

- Check your Senators’ or Representatives’ [record of support for EE](#). If they have signed on to these letters in the past **or supported EE in any fashion**, be sure to mention this in your email—it can make the decision to sign on again a no-brainer!
- If they’ve not been a past supporter, but other local Representatives or Senators have supported these programs, mention that, especially if the legislator you are contacting is a freshman or their immediate predecessor was a big supporter of the cause.
- Attach fact sheets on programs you are asking about, such as [EPA](#) and/or [NOAA](#), to the email so the staff have the information they need to follow through.
- If your organization, or even an NGO or school you work or volunteer for, got a grant, please include that information and something special about that program. If you haven’t gotten a grant, tell them in a paragraph what environmental education looks like in your community.
- You should add the name of a program in your district or state that was funded by one of the EPA or NOAA programs. Here’s a [folder](#) with state and territory lists. You should also attach your state list to your email.
- We are especially interested in asking legislators who are freshmen, on appropriations committees, and anybody who has EVER supported our cause.
- Let us know how it went so that we can track outreach and monitor any needed follow-up.
- NOTE: Members of the Senate and House appropriations committees often will not sign on to these letters of support, but they are in a position to champion and endorse the programs internally in the committee, so please contact them in particular! More about this is at the bottom of this guide.
- ***This is a very routine process for Congressional offices at this time of year.***

As an individual, you will first email or communicate for yourself as a constituent. If you can speak for your organization, that’s great and perfectly legal and proper because this is not considered lobbying. It’s not lobbying because you are not asking a legislator to vote for specific legislation, nor

would you be spending your organization's money on making this request, nor are you endorsing a candidate for office... all things that ARE lobbying. So everything we are asking you to do is perfectly legal and actually encouraged to do as an NGO. So go ahead and speak for your organization if you can.

If you can't speak for your group, it is fine to say that you are an educator at the local school, organization, or member of your local environmental education association, but you do not speak for them... You do want the Rep. or Senator to support these appropriations. Giving your credentials legitimately establishes you as an authentic authority on how these programs help the community.

Special Cases

Your Senator or Rep. Might have a Web Form to Fill Out

Some legislators have a program appropriations support web form to fill out for a request. An email to the Congressional office might prompt staff to instruct you to use a link to their website to make your request. If that happens, get in touch with me, Brock, ASAP, and I will walk you through this.

If your Member of Congress has one of these special appropriation program request systems, they may also tell you that the deadline has already passed. Please try to negotiate with them to accept your request. In that case, ask if you can just send them a short description of the programs, and they often relent and say they are making no promises.

Your Member of Congress is on an Appropriations Committee

Another special case: one of your legislators might be on the appropriations committee, as noted on the spreadsheet—this is fantastic! You really want to make sure that their staff understands what environmental education looks like in the district or state. In the end, however, most House appropriators don't sign these letters, though they have other ways to support the funding from within the committee, so go for it! On the Senate side, Senators on appropriations will sometimes sign on if this is for a program that is NOT coming before their subcommittee - this is because the letter is addressed to the members of the relevant subcommittee - which would be themselves! But again, write back and pursue these cases because they can support the programs from within the committee.

Your Member of Congress has a track record of being unsupportive of environmental education

We understand, and you can take a pass this year. Unfortunately, Republicans have rarely signed onto these kinds of letters for any appropriations... but ask anyway if you think your legislator might be a supporter of YOUR organization. Asking those lawmakers softens them up, so at least they won't vote against it!

Final thoughts

This focused campaign is part of ongoing engagements you should have with your legislators—national and local. Put the offices on your mailing list. Invite the government officials and their staff to visit your school or nature center. Politicians LOVE to have photos with local organizations, and especially kids, if that's who you serve. Tell government staff if you've gotten a great grant. All this helps, even if they don't end up signing the letters we are helping to circulate.

If you've not worked on this campaign before, we want to encourage you because with our very modest requests, it surprisingly only takes one or two enthusiastic constituents, who get to the right

person, to get support from a legislator. And if you look at the spreadsheet of Congressional support, wherever you see a legislator supporting our work one year but not the next, that's where they might not have been asked again—*because if we don't ask them, they won't know to do it.*

Thank you for helping to secure the future of environmental education!

Sample email to make a request

Email is the preferred way (and these days, the only way) to contact your legislators

(Note: bold/italic text in () is to be replaced by information you provide)

Subject: Appropriations programmatic sign-on letter request: (EPA and/or NOAA Offices of Environmental Education)

Hi _____,

Environmental education funding is essential for addressing our environmental challenges. These programs have very modest budgets, but the schools, nature centers, water conservation districts, and other organizations who benefit from the grant and other programs do a lot with a little!

Our state and community have benefited greatly from these programs; here are the fantastic grants received in the state and locally in the past ten years. ***(Add link to the specific list from your state found in [this folder](#))***

Please help secure this crucial funding by having Representative/Senator ***(Your member of Congress)*** join many other Members of Congress and sign on to these letters:

EPA support letters circulated by **Rep. Neguse (CO-2) OR Sen. Gillibrand (NY)** (select one depending on who you are emailing, House representative or Senator)

NOAA letters circulated by: **Rep. Castor (FL-15) OR Sen. Markey (MA)** (select one depending on who you are emailing, House representative or Senator)

Thank you for supporting environmental education!

(Your name)

(Your affiliation, if applicable; "member, your state EE association" is okay)